



## The Georgetown Loop

By: Jason Stamper

### Abstract

A travel essay and featured photography from *The Trackside Photographer*, December 21, 2017.

**Stamper, J.** (2017). "The Georgetown Loop." *The Trackside Photographer*, December 21, 2017. Permission to re-print granted by Publisher, version of record available at: <http://thetracksidephotographer.com/2017/12/21/the-georgetownloop/>

# The Georgetown Loop

---



*Looking down the canyon towards Georgetown, you can see the massive Devil's Gate High Bridge far below*

**T**HE GEORGETOWN, BRECKENRIDGE, AND LEADVILLE Railway, a subsidiary of the Union Pacific Railroad, completed the Georgetown Loop Railroad in 1884. Built as a 3-foot narrow gauge, its main objective was to haul silver out from the mines in Silver Plume. Due to the rugged and narrow confines of the Clear Creek canyon, the line wound 4 ½ miles from Georgetown to Silver Plume, a straight-line distance of only 2 miles. This portion of the line gains more than 600 feet in elevation with horseshoe turns, grades approaching 4%, and 4 bridges across Clear Creek. It also includes the massive 95-foot high Devils Gate Bridge that loops the line over itself. Later in 1893, the line became part of the Colorado and Southern

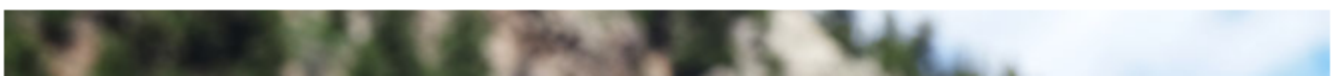


railroad system. Due to its unique construction and beautiful vistas, the Georgetown Loop has been popular with tourists since its beginning. The line was dismantled in 1939 due to declining revenue from the mines, but thankfully, was re-built in the 1980's.



*At both ends of the line, the locomotive “runs around” the train. Here it is getting ready to hook back up for the trip down to Georgetown.*

On a recent family vacation to Colorado, my family and I paid a visit to the Loop. You can ride the Loop starting at either Georgetown or Silver Plume. We started in Silver Plume. The railroad is very easily accessible by taking I-70 west from Denver, and in fact, the railroad runs right beside I-70. In Silver Plume, you can visit the original depot, and often catch some yard operations. There are also other cool sights to see in Silver Plume, such as the engine house and a small museum.







*This old signal is still attached to the depot in Silver Plume.*





*Mechanics work on the railroad's Shay locomotive in front of the shops.*



*In the museum, there are several vintage narrow gauge cars, including a parlor car.  
This is a peek inside of what was once a luxurious railcar.*







*This is one of the trucks on the old parlor car. Although it has seen better days, it is still very cool.*

Also, while in the Silver Plume area, the little town itself is well worth a visit. There are many historical buildings and hardly any paved roads. It still feels like an old west town.



*Here is one of the wonderful old buildings in Silver Plume.*

Once you depart Silver Plume, you can see all sorts of interesting sights. If you look up on the mountain sides, you can see the evidence of many old mines.







*These mine tailings are about all that's left of this once prosperous mine. Piles of tailings dot the mountains, and indicate how busy this area once was with mining.*







*As the train descended the track towards Georgetown, we crossed Clear Creek a total of 4 times. The day we were there, the creek was running very strong.*

As part of your train ticket, you have the option to purchase a mine tour of one of two old mines. We decided to tour the Everett Mine as part of our trip. In addition to our mine tour, we were treated to a hot dog lunch and gold panning. The train stops at a little station built for this purpose and picks you up to continue on your way later. This was well worth the little extra money, and even our young boys enjoyed the mine tour.



*This is the inside of the mine. The railroad operators are in the process of trying to re-open portions of the mine further beyond this point.*







*Another bonus of stopping for the mine tour is a fantastic opportunity to photograph the train crossing one of the bridges over Clear Creek.*



*Another sight along the way is the foundations and leftover parts from an old mill. Here too is a siding with some rolling stock parked on it. This rolling stock must have been acquired after the rebuilding of the line, since the D&RGW never operated the line.*



The highlight of the trip is the ride across the massive Devil's Gate Bridge. This 95 foot tall steel bridge has been rebuilt to look exactly like the original. The train slows to cross the bridge, and you are treated to unparalleled views of the narrow canyon in both directions. Far below, you can see the tracks that you will be on in just a few short minutes.



*Our train is being pulled across the Devil's Gate Bridge in the picture. On the way back, the locomotive will be on the other end of the train.*







*From our vantage point in the open gondola, you can see the beautiful lines of the Devil's Gate Bridge rising above us.*



*The train then pulls back a bit to load and unload passengers at the Devil's Gate (Georgetown) station. Here, the locomotive performs another "run around" maneuver and couples up to the other end of the train.*







*While the train was loading up, the engineer took some time to “oil around” his locomotive.*







*On our way back across the Devil's Gate Bridge, our engineer was paying close attention to his locomotive as it crept across the narrow span.*



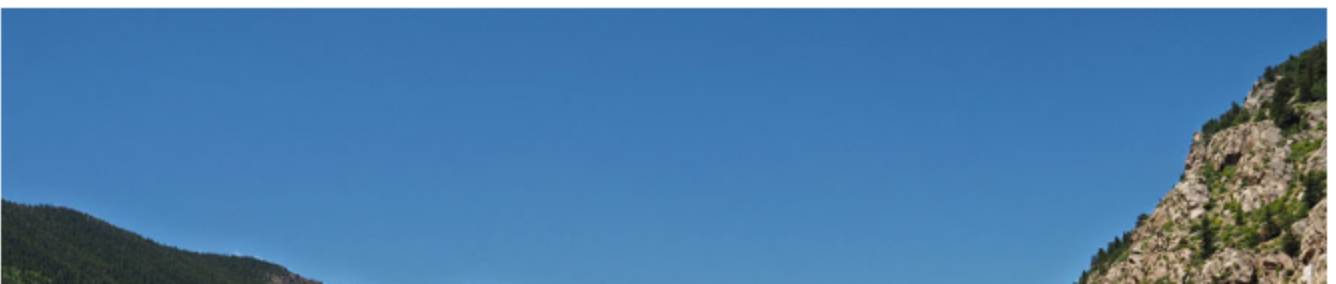


*Our locomotive for the day was a Baldwin 2-8-0 Consolidation, in what is called an outside frame model. That means the wheels are inside the frame, and here you can see the massive counterweights that are outside the frame. This allows for a larger locomotive to run on narrow gauge track.*

The Georgetown Loop Railroad is well worth the visit if you are ever in Colorado near Denver. It is easy to imagine yourself riding the line way back in the early 1900's. The slow-paced trip through the rugged Clear Creek Canyon is simply gorgeous, and offers an opportunity to truly experience the beauty of the Colorado Mountains.



*Here is the view looking towards Georgetown from the Devil's Gate Bridge. You can see the end of the tracks in the foreground, and Georgetown itself in the distance.*







*This is the view looking towards Silver Plume from the bridge. You can see the Devil's Gate station and parking area in the foreground, and I-70 off to the right, hugging the mountain side.*

**Jason Stamper** – *Photographs and text Copyright 2017*

Share this:



Related

**Railroad Findings in Colorado**

September 28, 2017  
In "Railroad landscape"

**Demise of the New River Bridge**

April 21, 2016  
In "Bridges"

**From the Main Line**

October 13, 2016  
In "On Photography"

*Posted in Bridges, Preservation and Museums, Railroad History, Travel · Tagged 2017, Colorado, Devil's Gate Bridge, Georgetown Loop · Edit*